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THE GOLDEN YEARS

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parts with family members; they tend to ignore it, and it can be devastating.

Family dynamics have a way of complicating the process.

"We run into the emotional aspect of it," Napolitano says. "It's easy for us as professionals to put it on paper and say, 'this makes the most sense.'"

Once the plan is in place, it needs to be revisited every couple of years (for ESOPs, a formal valuation is required every year and a renewal plan must be submitted to the IRS every five years).

"If there are any life changes within the family, you should revisit it," Napolitano says. "Every couple of years, the estate should be revisited."

Ensuring your future and that of your children is key, but there is another aspect to planning. Greener by Design's Heller sums it up best: "It isn't just about money. It's about seeing what you've created continue long-term." LM



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WORKINGSMARTER

JIM PALUCH

The author is president of JP Horizons Inc. Visit www.jp horizons.com.

You are what you communicate

Companies that are working smarter know the importance of sharing information in positive and productive ways. As soon as you finish this article, I suggest you take a walk around your company. Go ahead — it's just an investment of a couple of minutes, but it might give you some insights that could save you hours.

As you walk, ask yourself "What are we communicating to the rest of the team?" Your answer might fall into one of these categories:

1. "Nothing, unless old dusty workers' compensation certificates and a 2005 vendor calendar count." Actually, you are communicating *something*; you are telling your team that they are not important enough to share information with, and that you are not organized enough to have anything to share.

2. "We tell them just what we think they should know." You might be putting up a schedule board that tells them where they are going today and for whom they are working. You might also be putting up some signs that have phrases that begin "Anyone caught . . ."; "Stop doing . . ."; "Don't park on the . . ." and "You can no longer . . ." The negative messages and marching orders for the day seem to say "Welcome to San Quentin."

3. "We are having some success." If you are in this category, you are beginning to share some of the obvious and fundamental things. These include time without accidents, customer compliments and possibly even sales goals. You also might be posting budgeted hours, and letting the crews post their actual hours next to them. There also might be some reminders of equipment maintenance schedules or uniform deliveries taped up in the production area, and everyone knows when the next company outing is taking place.

4. "There is a commitment to clarity." There is a common area that everyone knows to go to get the information they need to make decisions and do

their jobs effectively. Charts and measurements are capturing the attention of people like a scoreboard at an NBA game. The pictures of this month's projects are securely placed, with some sense of order, on the team bulletin board. There are process maps and written instructions that allow people to clearly understand things that need explanation. Just by glancing around, you might see a commitment to continuous improvement by the learning opportunities listed somewhere, or explanations of new ideas that are being implemented. Another thing to look for is explanations of processes and the opportunity to improve them. Process maps and big white boards with plenty of markers generally are great indicators of innovative companies looking for new ideas.

Talking back

Now that the categories are presented, consider what the attitude of the employees might be like for each one:

1. "This is just a job until something better comes along."
2. "I'll do just enough to keep my job, but will do a little less whenever I can."
3. "I'll do the best I know how to do." (They realize there is a connection between their performance and the results being measured and communicated.)
4. "I have the information I need to be successful and have a positive impact on the company."

This last category is where every company wants to position themselves. There is an energy that comes from innovation and creativity. And when information is shared, people feel confident in their ideas and abilities.

You might already know what you will see in your journey around the company, but I challenge you to take the stroll anyway. If you feel a little discouraged by what you see (or don't see), just take some simple steps to change it. If you are excited with what you see, take some simple steps to keep improving upon it.

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SPRAYERS & SPREADERS



BEFORE YOU BUY

First inventory your existing fleet of spreaders and sprayers to ensure all work and are in operational order for spring service.

Maintenance includes:

- ▶ Fill compressed-air sprayer tanks 1/4-full with mild dishwashing solution and shake them to loosen spray residues. Then pressurize the tanks, spray out the water and drain the tanks upside down.
- ▶ Remove sprayer nozzle tips and screens and clean them with soapy water.
- ▶ Thoroughly clean spreaders of all materials.
- ▶ Apply oil to the bottom of your spreader hoppers and all moving parts.
- ▶ Store spreaders with their shutters open.

EarthWay →

The 2130 High-Output Push Broadcast spreader applies high-volume or large-particle materials. The 2130 spreads rock salt, dry sand and seed mulch pellets. Rain Cover and three-sided deflector kits are available. www.earthway.com or 800/294-0671

← Reelcraft

Heavy-duty Series 30000 reels feature vibration-proof, self-locking fasteners and corrosion-resistant, powdercoated steel components. They can handle up to 325 ft. of 1/2-in.-diameter hose, and feature Super Swivel for maximum product delivery. The hoses handle a broad range of pressures, temperatures and chemicals. www.reelcraft.com/ag or 800/444-3134

Bobcat

The Bobcat sprayer has a 60-gal. tank and is driven by the tractor's power take off (PTO). The boom is 10-ft. wide and has a breakaway feature should the sprayer come in contact with trees or other obstructions. Springs extend the boom back out once the tractor has passed the obstruction. A hand wand attached to a 15-ft. hose allows the operator to spot spray chemicals only where needed. www.bobcat.com

Finn Corp.

The Titan HydroSeeder handles large areas, steep slopes and hard-to-reach areas. Featuring a 170-hp, turbo diesel, Tier 3-compliant Cummins QSB engine, the Titan provides 48% more hp than standard hydroseeder packages, allowing it to spray distances of up to 320 ft. The engine includes a control panel with a digital display, as well as an electronic control unit with self-diagnostics to monitor low oil pressure and initiate high temperature shutoff. www.finncorp.com or 800/543-7166



Kubota Tractor Corp.

The Land Pride FSP spreader series features an all-steel frame and frontal splashplate. The broadcast spreaders are available in three hopper sizes: 350, 563 and 673 lbs. The seamless inner wall allows material to flow freely for complete clean-out. Delivery is adjustable to spread on the left, right or with full width of 54 ft., allowing users to cover large areas in one pass. www.landpride.com or 785/823-3276

C&S Turf Care Equipment

The Turf Tracker Time Machine can spread and spray an acre of turf in 10 minutes. The zero-turn, hydrostatic drive allows for maximum maneuverability. Standard features include a 200-lb. capacity, 3-speed spreader; a 12-gal. spray tank; 25-ft. hose with hand-gun for spot spraying and a border deflector. www.csturfequip.com or 800/872-7050

King Inc.

The Mulch King landscaping trailer comes with a 4,000-CFM, high-capacity mulch blower that doubles as vacuum source for leaf pick up. One worker can spread up to 8 yds. of evenly distributed mulch per hour — without the need for wheelbarrows or shovels. Mulch King allows small- to mid-sized landscaping companies to reduce labor and increase productivity up to 66%. The unit is available in 4-, 8- and 12-yd. models, and can be towed by any full-size half-ton truck. www.kmtco.com or 330/833-7217

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LMREPORTS



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Gregson-Clark

Spreader-Mate is a self-contained, drop-in sprayer that can be installed in most commercial broadcast spreaders. The molded, 9-gal. polyethylene tank features a pump, battery, filter, regulator and valves, all mounted. A hand spray wand allows for easy application in hard-to-access areas, ornamental beds, etc. www.gregsonclark.com or 800/706-9530

Northern Turf Equipment Mfg.

The SS 220 Ride On Spread-N-Spray provides synchronized spreading and spraying. It spreads fertilizer from 4 ft. to 32 ft. from its 220-lb. hopper with easy dashboard adjustment. The 20-gal. spray unit provides 4-, 8- or 16-ft. spray patterns on the fly — with two spread speeds and six spray rates. It also has three forward speeds, reverse and hydraulic front disc brakes. www.northernturfequipment.com or 847/540-2335

SourceOne

New TurfSavr is a spreader, slicer and dethatcher. It will slice and spread seed or fertilizer a 22-in.-wide path in one pass. Remove the hopper, and a dethatching flail reel can be installed for use as a dethatcher. It's available with an 8-hp Honda GX270 OHV or 9-hp Briggs & Stratton Vanguard engine, and is self-propelled. www.sourceonex.com or 888/418-9065

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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Business lessons from the field

The 2007 Fiesta Bowl was what I (and millions of other fans) consider to be the best college football game played in recent years. That night, Boise State beat the University of Oklahoma 43-42 in overtime. The experts and oddsmakers expected Boise State to lose. Oklahoma was too big and too good.

How did Boise State pull off the win? And what does it mean for you?

1. They were prepared with a well-thought-out game plan. Are you prepared? Does your budget minimize non-essential costs? Have you reviewed your pricing to ensure you can compete? Are you proactive with your customers, managing budgets and delivery? Boise State was aware that they did not have the guns the Sooners had, but they knew how to expose the Sooners' weaknesses.

Everyone has the challenge of delivering consistent quality. Make this Job No. 1 this year. This one tactic exposes the weakness of any competitor — the challenge of keeping customers happy 98% of the time. Make certain everyone on your team understands what the customer considers "quality," and delivers it. You won't lose customers, and you will pick up some defectors along the way.

2. They played to their strengths. Boise State, while smaller, was solid in their skill positions. They were able to make plays outside of the tackles with their talented players.

Your sources of strength in a tight economy are relationships and cash. A strong cash position gives you the ability to leverage relationships with both customers and vendors. Have you talked with your bank about increasing your line of credit? Are you conserving cash by extending the life of your equipment? Have you gone to your vendors to press for better prices and services in exchange for faster payment or increased purchase volume? Have you negotiated higher prices with some of your customers, and lower prices with others to keep the relationships working for you?

Make certain every vendor and customer hears from you. Make cash and relationship management Job No. 2 this year.

3. They took chances. Boise State used trick plays to surprise the Sooners. They did not play the traditional post-season football game. This had the effect of neutralizing some of the Sooners' speed, as well as confusing the defense.

What kinds of trick plays do you have in your playbook? Are you willing to use aggressive pricing in select situations to win the big jobs? Are you willing to spend more money on marketing with a message that is both edgier and delivered more frequently? Customers have a lot of choices in a tight economy, and they *will* shop. You have to get your message through the noise, and be willing to "go low" on a few jobs at the right time. Make marketing Job No. 3 this year.

4. They believed they could win. Boise State had faith in their coach and in themselves as a team. This, in the end, might have been the difference. They knew the extent of the challenge, and they were not discouraged by it.

What are you doing to communicate the challenge and your plan to your team? Have you made certain that you have all of the right people on the bus? All it takes is one pessimist to sink the ship sometimes. Make certain it is not you, and that anyone else who takes that role gets coached back in — or coached out the door. People need to have faith in their leaders and trust their teammates. People respond to optimistic realism. Make team morale Job No. 4 this year.

What a game at the end! Are you kidding me? The Statue of Liberty* trick play to win it. Boise State left it all on the field that night.

They did not worry so much about the opponent (*I like the Sooners just fine!*) as much as they focused on their own effort.

Did they get lucky? Maybe so. But luck, as they say, still favors the prepared — especially in today's tight economy.

*** Lady Liberty on**

the field: The Statue of Liberty trick play consists of the quarterback faking a pass, then just standing there with the ball in his raised hand. The halfback, running a crossing route, nabs the ball and runs. It is usually seen at the high school level by a desperate team in a blowout game, and often, it doesn't work. But the move made headlines (and a win) in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl.